

## TIPS FOR A HAPPY AND HEALTHY CAT



As with humans, there are no guarantees that your new cat will live to an old age. However, if you follow the guidelines below, you will greatly enhance the likelihood that this new member of your family will be with you for 10, 15, or even 20 years.

### **1. Keep your cat inside – Always**

Virtually every cat rescue and animal welfare organization advocates for indoors-only cats. This is the single most important thing you can do to protect your cat from a premature death. Keeping your cat inside will mean that he/she will NOT die from Feline Leukemia, Feline AIDS, getting hit by a car, being killed by a dog, coyote, or other predator, getting lost/running away, eating poison and being subjected to theft and/or abuse by disturbed adults and children.

Do not let your cat out on a deck or porch this is not screened. We recently heard about an 8-year-old cat that died after inexplicably jumping off a deck...after years of staying put without incident.

It is an outmoded perception that it is cruel or unnatural to keep cats cooped up inside. Playing with a cat satisfies the animal's stalking instinct and keeps the cat healthy through exercise. In fact, an indoor cat that gets lots of attention is happier than an indoor-outdoor cat that is generally ignored by human companions.

Is your cat very determined to escape out an open door? Keep a water bottle by your door and zap him with it whenever he looks like he wants to bolt through it. If you are consistent, he will eventually lose interest in being an escape artist.

### **2. Acclimating Your Cat to His/Her New Home**

You are excited about your cat joining your household and it's tempting to immediately give him free run of your home. However, it's almost always advisable to confine a cat to a relatively small area in the beginning as they get to know you, other household pets, and your routine. Please keep in mind that some of our rescued cats have not had experience in living in a house, and that their world up until this time has been a life outside and then in a single room while being fostered. Your house will seem very large and even frightening to your new cat. Allow him time to feel secure before you gradually increase his living space.

On a related note, you will want to ensure that your new cat becomes accustomed to the location of the litter boxes in your home. Make sure he has easy access to a box at the beginning. Later, when you expand his living environment, bring him back to a box every hour or two to remind him of the location.

### **3. Regular Veterinarian Visits**

Please visit your local veterinary clinic with all the medical records provided in your adoption materials. Ask for a file to be started on your pet and to be notified when vaccinations and other services are due. Even "inside cats" need to be kept up-to-date on vaccinations, flea control, and anti-parasitic medication. Every time you walk into your house, you are potentially bringing in harmful pests, bacteria and viruses on your shoes and clothing. Healthy cats need to see the veterinarian at least once a year, and many veterinarians recommend a "well cat" check-up every 6 months. Remember, a cat's life span is roughly 20 percent of a human's, and their aging cycle is much more rapid. Missing a year for a check-up is comparable to a person not seeing a physician for 14 years.

### **4. Nutrition – Quality Food and Over-Eating**

Most grocery store pet food contains primarily fillers (e.g., grains) and meat by-products (e.g., beaks, bones, feet, etc). Instead, give your cat a food brand that lists a meat or a meat meal as the top ingredient, and contains no

animal by-products. Natural Balance, Nutro, Royal Canin are examples of good quality food and can be found at PETCO and other retail pet stores. COSTCO's "Kirkland" brand is very high quality at a reasonable price.

Wheat-Free – There are some proponents of wheat-free food, with a special emphasis on canned food. This type of food can be helpful for cats who exhibit gastrointestinal or allergy problems. High-end pet stores (e.g., Red Bandana) as well as PetSmart and PETCO usually carry several wheat-free brands. To learn more about the arguments for this type of diet, [www.catinfo.org](http://www.catinfo.org) is a good resource.

Dry vs. Wet (canned/pouch) – I recommend use a combination of the two so that the cat receives both urinary health from the moist and dental benefits from eating dry food. To that end, I suggest offering moist food at least one a day to your cat.

Kittens – If you have adopted a kitten, remember that even when they reach full size, they continue to develop bone and muscle until one year of age... so keep your young cat on kitten food until he/she reaches that age.

Overweight Cats – We see overweight domestic cats much more often than underweight cats. Although some people think heavy cats are acceptable or even amusing, extra weight is no healthier for a cat than a human...and will take years off its lifespan. If you notice your cat getting heavy (and your vet can confirm that), switch to a low-calorie food and help your cat get needed exercise with playtime every day.

### **5. Break-away Collars**

Most vets will tell you that cats with buckle-on collars are susceptible to strangling themselves. Pet stores carry "break-away" collars that will snap off when the cat gets snagged on something. You may end up losing a few of them, but that is better than losing your cat.

### **6. Scratching**

There are a number of effective strategies to prevent destructive scratching as alternatives to declawing (which is amputation of the first digit of the cats' claws). Scratching is a natural reaction by the cat to periodic shedding of the nail covering. He/she should not be punished for doing what comes naturally, but should instead be redirected to a scratching post or other device. The best post is one that is 32-36 inches tall (it allows the cat to stretch out) and is constructed with sisal rope or sisal carpeting. Do NOT use posts that are made of traditional carpeting, as that only encourages them to scratch your carpet.

Trim your cat's claws every week or two. Spend time gently handling your cat's feet so that trimming their claws is not stressful to them. Your veterinarian can show you how to do this or even do it for you on a regular basis.

Some people have good luck with "Soft Paws" or "Soft Claws", which are available at PETCO and other pet retailers and through the Internet. Another good behavioral tool is double-sided tape to affix to areas that your cat is particularly interested in (PETCO carries the version that easily fits on a sofa or armchair side). A squirt gun or water bottle is also a humane way of moderating your cat's behavior when he/she goes after a piece of furniture.

Additional tips about scratching can be found at [www.angelsrescue.org/adoptables-adoption-resources.asp](http://www.angelsrescue.org/adoptables-adoption-resources.asp).

### **7. Litter Box Problems**

Not using a litter box is one of the most common reasons why cats end up in shelters. This is unfortunate, because there is almost always either a medical or behavioral cause that can be effectively addressed. The first thing that must be ruled out is a urinary tract infection, and if your cat suddenly starts urinating outside the litter box you should immediately make an appointment with your vet to have her/him tested for such a condition.

Assuming there is no medical issue, your cat is telling you that there is something about the litter box, litter or location that he/she doesn't like. Using unscented litter and an uncovered large box, and regular cleaning of the litter box are basic tips for avoiding litter box problems. Two excellent fact sheets on litter box issues can be found

on our website at [www.angelsrescue.org/adoptables-adoption-resources.asp](http://www.angelsrescue.org/adoptables-adoption-resources.asp). You will note that the clinic suggests using a litter box that is made out of a transparent storage bin with an entrance cut out for the cat. These are very effective, and I can provide you with those for \$25 each. Dr. Elsey's Cat Attract Litter, found at PetSmart, can also be very helpful in getting your cat back on the right track.

## **8. Lost Pet Issues**

### **Guarding Against a Lost Cat - Cat Carriers, ID Tags, and Microchip Registration.**

*Carriers* - We have heard of many instances where a beloved cat is lost forever when he/she is being transported to the vet or on vacation and escapes while being carried to or from the car. Avoid this tragic outcome by placing your cat securely in a carrier BEFORE he leaves the house and ALWAYS have him secured in the carrier before any car windows or doors are opened.

*Screen Windows* – Cats are prone to break through screen windows. Please supervise your cat any time he/she has access to an open screened window.

*ID Tags* – Keep a small tag with two phone numbers (yours and someone else's, in case you can't be located) on your cat. Even inside cats can escape through such means as a careless workman leaving a door open, a torn screen window, and a natural disaster, as we saw following Katrina when so many pets were left homeless.

*Microchip Registration* – Cats adopted from Angels Among Us Pet Rescue are micro-chipped, and we will register that chip with HomeAgain. It is important that you keep your contact information current, either by phone or through the company's website.

### **If Your Cat is Lost**

The more quickly you initiate efforts to find him, the more successful you are likely to be. First, please call me so that I can help with your search. For example, we may be able to loan you a trap if the situation merits that type of approach. You should also notify HomeAgain, and immediately post large-print flyers at major intersections near your home, vet clinics, grocery stores, coffee shops, etc. You should also send out an email alert to your neighborhood and/or distribute flyers. In addition, contact your county's animal services agency and ask how to post your lost pet, as well as to search the shelter's "found" pets. Craig's List ([www.craigslist.com](http://www.craigslist.com)) is a free user-friendly internet classified ads resource where you can post an ad, including photos. For metro Atlanta adopters, you can also call the Atlanta Journal Constitution (770 577-5772) to place a free ad.

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### **Need help? Have questions?**

You can find additional tips about medical and behavioral issues on our website:

<http://angelsrescue.org/adoptables-adoption-resources.asp>

Also, the Humane Society of the United States has great tips and resources:

[http://www.hsus.org/pets/pet\\_care/cat\\_care/](http://www.hsus.org/pets/pet_care/cat_care/)

### **Let us know if you need help!**

Remember, we are always available to discuss medical or behavioral problems you may be experiencing with your cat. Please call as soon as you have a problem and try not to wait until you have a major issue that is more difficult to resolve!

Our contact information is on our website at <http://angelsrescue.org/contact-us.asp>.